

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge  
11978 Turtle Pond Road  
Milton, DE 19968  
302/684 8419  
302/684 8504 FAX  
E-mail: FW5RW\_PHNWR@fws.gov  
<http://primehook.fws.gov>

Federal Relay Service  
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing  
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>

September 2004



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Prime Hook

## *National Wildlife Refuge*



Black-necked stilt  
Bill Buchanan/USFWS

*There can be  
no greater issue  
than that  
of conservation  
in this country...*

—President Theodore Roosevelt

## Welcome



This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 530 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat. It represents the most comprehensive wildlife resource management program in the world.

Situated along the marshes of the western Delaware Bay, Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge protects more than 10,000 acres of valuable habitat for wildlife of all kinds. Roughly 80% of the refuge is a mix of fresh and saltwater wetlands stretching from Slaughter Beach in the north to the Broadkill River in the south.

The refuge was established in 1963 to preserve and protect coastal wetlands as migrating and wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl. Today, the refuge hosts thousands of ducks, geese, and shorebirds each year, and provides habitat for other species like the endangered Delmarva Peninsula Fox Squirrel and Bald Eagle.

## Beach Plum



R.H. Uva

*Why is it called "Prime Hook"?*  
When Dutch settlers arrived at what is now Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, they discovered an abundance of purple beach plums. So they called the area *Prume Hoek*, meaning Plum Point.

## Working for Wildlife

The goal of refuge management is to provide habitat for a diversity of native fish, wildlife, and plants. The mix of wetlands, uplands and forest on the refuge are home to a wide variety of native birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and plants.



*Wood ducks*



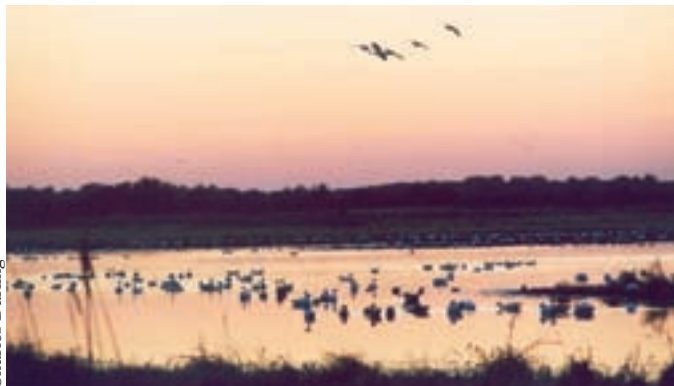
Dave Menke/USFWS

Strategically located on the Atlantic Flyway, the refuge manages 4,200 acres of freshwater marshes to provide feeding and resting areas for migrating birds. Through a series of dikes and water control structures, the refuge lowers water levels in the spring. Lower water levels allow the growth of annual marsh plants like wild rice, millet, and beggars tick. In the spring, summer, and fall it also provides a place for tens of thousands of migrating shorebirds such as dunlin, dowitchers, sandpipers, and plovers to feed.

In the summer, there are nesting areas for wading birds like least bitterns and shorebirds like spotted sandpipers and black-necked stilts. Higher water levels in the fall and winter make the seeds of annual plants available for the thousands of migrating ducks and geese. More than 100,000 snow geese and 80,000 ducks are at the refuge during peak fall migration.

The refuge has almost 2,300 acres of tidal salt marsh. Refuge salt marshes,

*Waterfowl at sunset*



Charles Darling

*Mature hardwood forest*



Marsha Polk/USFWS

which are a rapidly diminishing habitat type on the east coast, provide critical habitat for seaside and salt marsh sharp-tailed sparrows. Tidal salt marsh communities are particularly important nursing grounds for young fish, crabs, and other invertebrate fauna.

Upland areas that include scrub-shrub and forested habitats account for less than 20% of refuge lands, but are very important to many species. Shrub habitats adjacent to wetland areas are critical for breeding and migrating Coastal Plain Swamp Sparrows, a unique subspecies of sparrows found in Delaware and a resource of concern for the refuge. Prime Hook forested habitats are also important for breeding and migrating songbirds that pass through in the spring and fall to fuel up during their long journeys.

Mature hardwood forests provide critical habitat for Bald Eagles and the endangered Delmarva Peninsula Fox



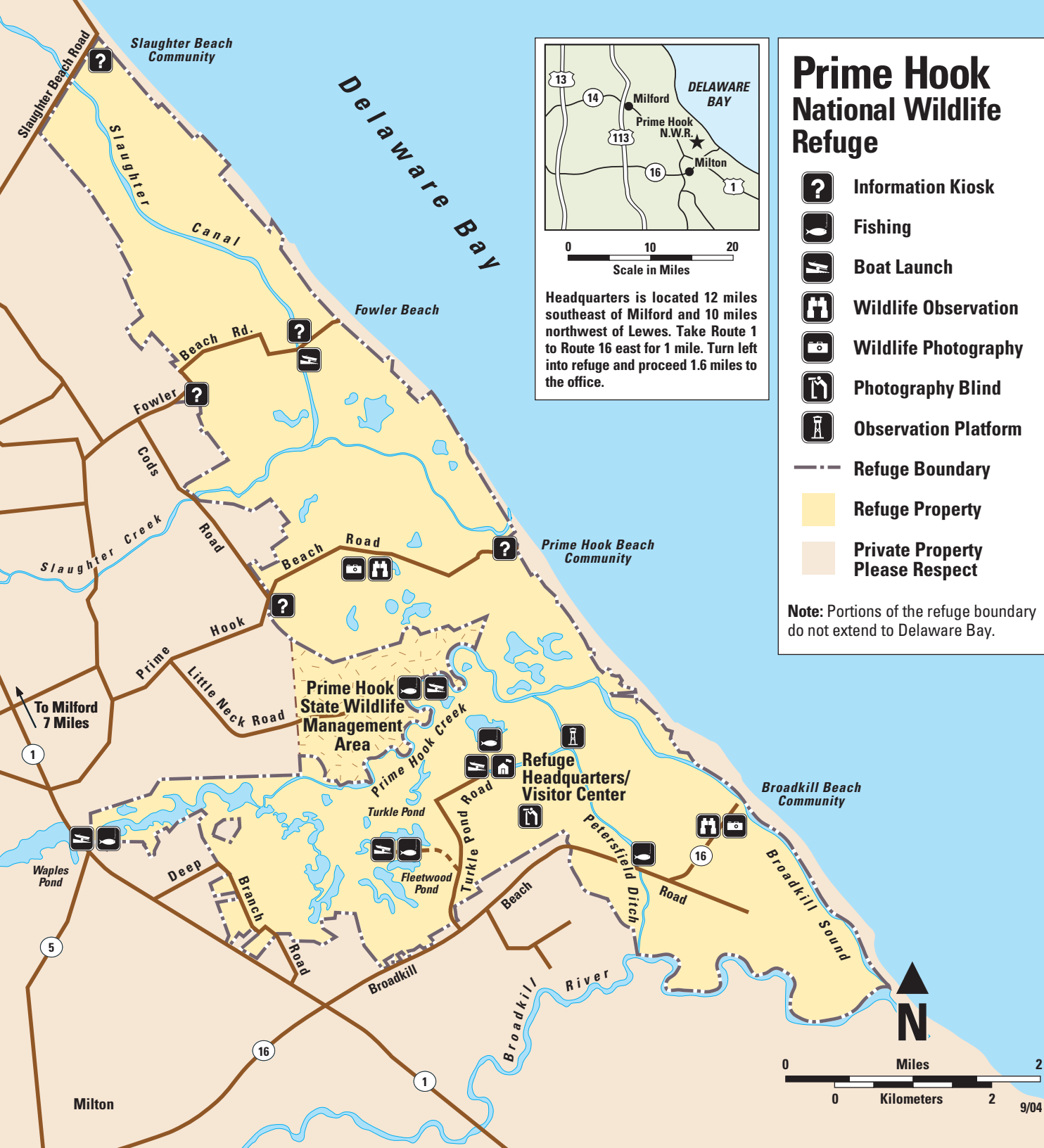
USFWS

*Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel*

*Black swallowtail*



Kate McManus/USFWS



Squirrel. In 1986, this native mammal was reintroduced to Delaware where management efforts focus on two activities: 1) monitoring the population; and 2) restoring and enhancing mature hardwood habitat to ensure the long term survival of this unique squirrel. Other species dependent on refuge forested habitats include breeding Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawks, wild turkeys, flying squirrels and many species of salamanders, lizards, turtles, frogs and toads.

## Things to do at the Refuge



*Kids fishing*

## Waterfowl in refuge marshes



Recreational and educational activities that are compatible with protecting and managing wildlife habitat are available at the refuge throughout the year. Special public use regulations are in place to protect refuge lands and wildlife.

## Fishing

Fishing is permitted along the Headquarters Canal in Prime Hook Creek, and Turtle and Fleetwood Ponds. These freshwater marshes and ponds are popular fishing areas for largemouth bass, pickerel, white perch, and crappie. Boats up to 25 horsepower are permitted in Prime Hook Creek. Only electric or hand propelled boats are permitted in Turtle and Fleetwood Ponds. Petersfield Ditch and Slaughter Canal are brackish tidal waters popular for fishing and crabbing from shore. Please follow all state and federal sport fishing regulations. A state fishing license is required to fish in all non-tidal waters.



## Hunting

The refuge works closely with the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife to provide hunting opportunities. Each year thousands of hunters visit the refuge for waterfowl, deer, and upland game hunting. There are special regulations for hunting on the refuge and a permit is required. More information is available from the refuge office or on the refuge website at <http://primehook.fws.gov>.



## Canoeing and Kayaking

Visitors can paddle 15 miles or more of creeks, streams, and marsh. The refuge Canoe Trail Brochure can help guide your visit through Prime Hook Creek. There is limited access to the canoe trail from September through March. Turtle and Fleetwood Ponds also provide canoeing and kayaking opportunities for visitors.

## Boardwalk Trail



Lewis and Elizabeth Dumont



## Walking Trails

Located off Broadkill Beach Road, the Headquarters area offers four walking trails through fields, forests, and marsh. Interpretive signs at each trail feature refuge history and wildlife. The 1/2-mile Boardwalk Trail and an observation platform on the Dike Trail are wheelchair accessible. A trail map is available at the visitor center.



## Wildlife Observation and Photography

A photography blind overlooks a secluded pond in the Headquarters





*Wild orchid*



*Ruddy turnstone*



### *Public Outreach*

area. It is available on a first-come, first serve basis.

In addition to the walking trails, the four state highways bisecting the refuge can be spectacular places for wildlife viewing and photography.

During fall and winter, the marshes along Broadkill Beach Road are filled with thousands of snow geese and migrating ducks. Shorebirds also use this area during late spring, summer, and early fall when water levels are lower. In the summer, the shallow pools along Prime Hook Beach and Fowler Beach Roads are good places to spot wading birds like glossy ibis, great egrets, or American bitterns. Please be cautious when viewing wildlife along these public roads.

### *Environmental Education*

The refuge provides a living classroom for students of all ages. Through teacher training and volunteer-led field trips, an outing to the refuge can enhance learning about nature and management for wildlife. The refuge works with local schools to meet state mandated curriculum standards. Call the refuge for more information.



### *Volunteers*

Prime Hook has a strong tradition of volunteerism. Volunteers contribute toward many refuge programs including biological, maintenance,



*Prairie warbler*  
Steve Maslowski/USFWS



### **A Few Simple Rules to Protect Visitors and Wildlife**



### *Slaughter Creek*



education, and public use programs. If you would like to conserve natural resources and dedicate your time and talents, please join us and be a part of a growing organization.

### *Visitor Contact Station*

The Visitor Contact Station is located inside the refuge headquarters building. It's open from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, seven days a week seasonally. The Visitor Contact Station features refuge literature, displays of refuge wildlife and photographs, and educational films.

The refuge is open 1/2-hour before sunrise until 1/2-hour after sunset.

This is a carry-in, carry-out facility. Please take all trash with you.

Dogs are permitted on a short handheld leash for the entire visit. Please clean up after your pets.

Horses are not permitted.

Swimming, camping, fires, or overnight stays are not permitted. Motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted to entrance roads and designated parking areas. Bicycles are not permitted on the trails.

### **Please do not abandon wild or domestic animals on the refuge.**

Abandoned animals can introduce disease into refuge wildlife populations or prey on native species.

Remember this is ***your*** national wildlife refuge. Disturbing, destroying or removing vegetation, wildlife or facilities is a crime.

Enjoy your visit here. Please respect the land, the wildlife and other visitors. ***Remember — take only memories or photographs, and leave only footprints.***